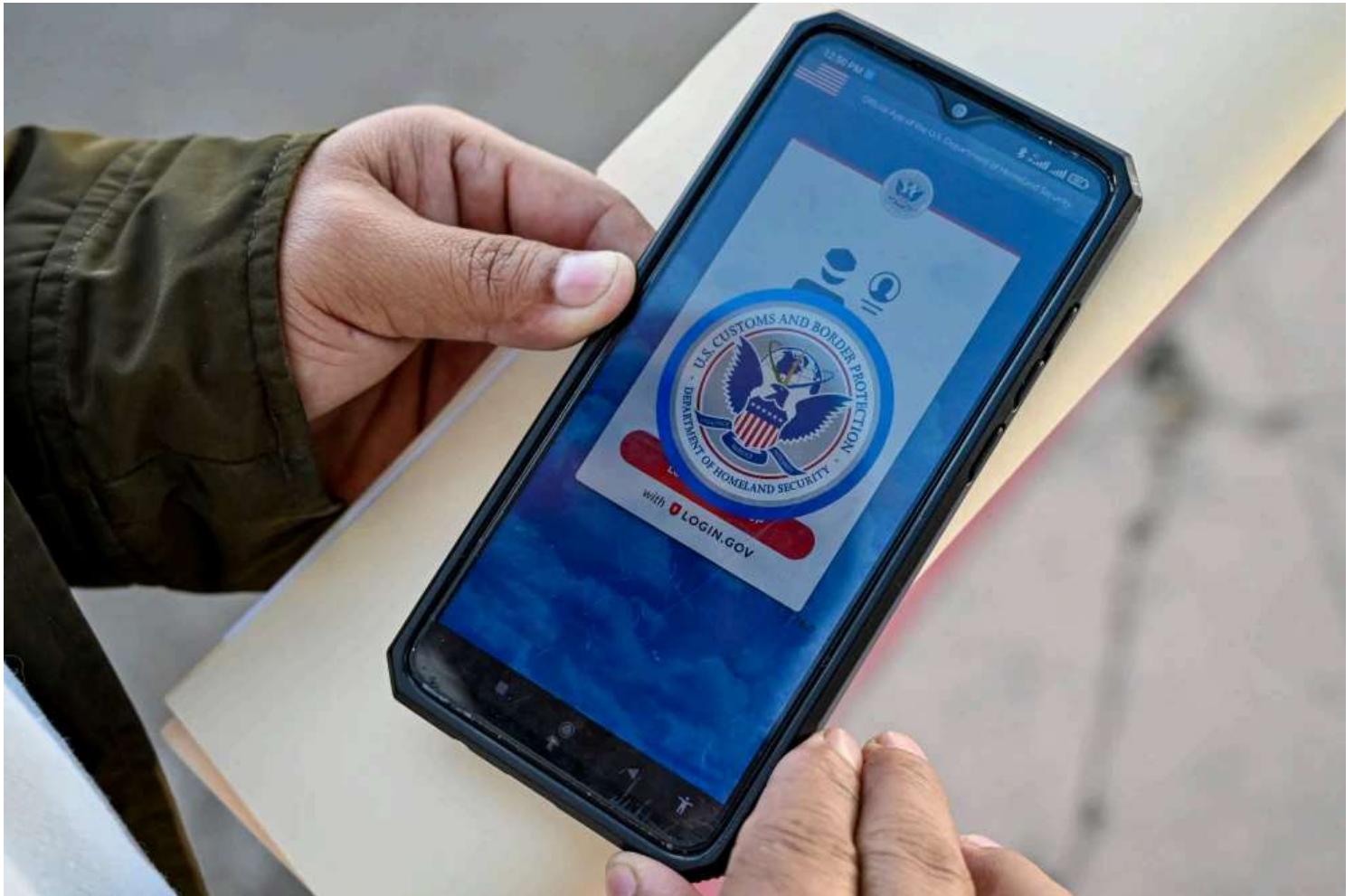


## Trump admin aims to get undocumented immigrants to self-deport with new messaging campaign

DHS is spending \$200 million on nationwide ads and a mobile app that could help track self-deportations as the president seeks to tout his immigration crackdown.



— An asylum-seeker reviews the CBP One app in Tijuana, Mexico, on Jan. 17.

Carlos Moreno / NurPhoto via Getty Images file

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**By Nicole Acevedo**

With a [mobile app](#) and an [expansive ad campaign](#), the Department of Homeland Security is ramping up its efforts to convince immigrants who don't have legal status to self-deport.

The efforts come as [the number of deportations](#) is [lower than what President Donald Trump expected](#) in his first couple of months in office after making [the issue a key campaign promise](#).

This week the Trump administration revived the [CBP One app](#) under another name and with a different purpose. Under the Biden administration, the app allowed migrants to apply to enter the U.S. legally as asylum-seekers.

Now relaunched as the [CBP Home app](#), the mobile application has "a self-deportation reporting feature," [DHS announced Monday](#). According to the agency, self-deportations are "the safest option" for undocumented immigrants, "while preserving law enforcement resources."

Revamping the app is part of a larger messaging campaign from the government that includes [ads](#) starring Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem encouraging immigrants who are not legally present in the U.S. to leave the country. According to DHS, the agency is spending [\\$200 million](#) on these efforts.

The [domestic version of the ad](#) starts with Noem thanking Trump for his immigration crackdown. She then says: "President Trump has a clear message for those that are in our country illegally. Leave now. If you don't, we will find you and we will deport you. You will never return." Noem concludes the ad by saying: "The choice is yours. America welcomes those who respect our laws. Because a strong nation is a safe nation."

So far, TV stations in parts of New Jersey, [New York, California and Florida](#) have aired the ad, as well as stations in cities such as [Phoenix, Boston, Dallas, Philadelphia and Washington](#).

DHS also released [an international version of the ad](#) that is similar, but instead discourages people from entering the U.S. illegally.

[The Associated Press reported](#) that two Republican-linked firms received government contracts to manage the messaging campaign.

In a [statement](#), Noem said that immigrants who self-deport "may still have the opportunity to return legally in the future and live the American dream. If they don't, we will find them, we will deport them, and they will never return."

Immigration experts and advocates warned of Noem's self-deportation message and the possibility of being able to legally return to the U.S.

"The operative word in that quote from the secretary is 'may,'" Kathleen Bush-Joseph, a policy analyst with the U.S. Immigration Policy Program at the Migration Policy Institute, told NBC News. She said the [consequences of voluntary removal vary widely](#) depending on each person's case and whether "they have accrued unlawful presence" or received a deportation order. These and other factors may preclude a person's chances of re-entering the U.S. legally.

"For many people who leave the United States, there may never be a lawful option for return to the United States, or reentry may be barred for many years," Heidi Altman, the vice president of policy at the National Immigration Law Center, an advocacy organization, said in an email. "Forcing or coercing people into leaving their homes and their loved ones carries political, moral, and economic costs – the administration should be ashamed."

With Trump also [terminating a number of legal immigration programs](#), such as [the original CBP One app](#), [refugee programs](#) and [Temporary Protected Status](#), immigrant rights advocate Felipe Sousa-Lazaballet said immigrants who were previously in the country legally may be more vulnerable to Trump's new enforcement tactics as they start losing their legal protections.

In the face of Trump's promise to carry out what he called "[the largest deportation program in American history](#)," [Sousa-Lazaballet warned about the use of self-deportations](#) to bypass the [logistical hurdles of finding and removing an estimated 11 million people](#) in the U.S. who lack legal status.

"They call this enforcement by attrition. It's the idea that you make life so impossible that people leave on their own," Sousa-Lazaballet told NBC News.

The ad's messaging, he said, is designed to make people "believe that they have no safety net and that the only thing they can do is leave – we have constitutional rights in this country independently of our immigration status."

Bree Bernwanger, a senior staff attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Northern California, said that "people who have been living in the United States, even without status, have a right enshrined in federal law to contest their removal in immigration court, in a hearing before an immigration judge."

Bernwanger warned that one of the consequences of accepting [voluntary departure](#) – a legal option available allowing a noncitizen to leave the U.S. instead of being deported – is that "it can bar your re-entry to the United States, even if you have a lawful basis to re-enter."

But for an administration that seeks to tout its deportation efforts, the new app could serve as a tool to track self-deportations, which are notoriously hard to quantify, Bush-Joseph said.

Data exists on voluntary departures and voluntary returns, [which often happen at the border](#), Bush-Joseph said, but data on immigrants who are not in formal removal proceedings and choose to leave the country does not exist.



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